

Greater Clark Parks District Program Re-Evaluation

Questions & Answers

Q: What is the Greater Clark Parks District?

A: The Greater Clark Parks District was created in February 2005 when voters in the unincorporated urban area of Clark County passed Proposition 1. This property tax-based metropolitan parks district was designed to provide maintenance and some capital funding for 30 new neighborhood parks, five new community parks, seven miles of new walking trails, and 41 little league and soccer fields within the unincorporated urban area of Clark County. The remaining property acquisition, planning, design, permitting and construction costs are provided by Park Impact Fees, the Real Estate Excise Tax, grants and donations.

All the parks district projects are located within, or serve residents of, the unincorporated urban area of Clark County. The Board of Clark County Commissioners oversees the program.

Q: Why are you re-evaluating the parks district program?

A: The original development and construction budget estimates for the projects that are part of the Greater Clark Parks District program were established in 2004. Since that time, these costs have increased significantly. Nationally, construction costs have risen dramatically in the last year due to inflation and increased overseas competition driving up prices for materials like concrete and asphalt. In addition, a lot more information is now known about unique design and construction challenges at many of the park sites, like extensive wetland mitigation and adjacent street improvements, which will require additional funding to accommodate.

As a result, the development and construction budgets and schedules for the remaining 30 Greater Clark Parks District projects not already under construction are now being analyzed and updated to reflect these cost increases. We are also currently examining various ways to reduce costs and raise revenue in order to keep the program moving forward.

The maintenance and operations funding provided by the parks district is still enough to cover long-term needs maintenance needs at all the parks, and is not being re-evaluated at this time.

Q: How much money do we have now?

A: We are still evaluating existing revenue projections, but preliminary estimates show we have approximately \$33-35 million in existing Park Impact Fees, Real Estate Excise Taxes, and capital funds from the Greater Clark Parks District to plan, design and construct the projects over the next six years.

Q: How much money is needed to complete the projects?

A: Our analysis is not yet complete, but preliminary estimates show that planning, designing, permitting and constructing the first phase of the remaining projects could cost approximately \$50-55 million to complete in order to meet all original promises. Additional funding sources to cover these costs are available, but must first be approved by the Board of Clark County Commissioners.

Q: How will this affect the remaining parks district projects?

A: Our analysis is still under way at this time. However, our goal remains to provide quality parks, trails and sports fields for residents within the unincorporated urban area of Clark County. Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation and Clark County Public Works are considering a variety of options to cover the increased costs and keep the program moving forward. Possible options range from cutting costs by conducting all design work in-house and constructing the parks in phases, to acquiring additional funds from other park-dedicated resources. Many of these options must be approved by the Board of Clark County Commissioners before they can be implemented. We plan to present our final analysis and options to them for review and guidance at a work session on August 29.

Q: What about the new sports fields?

A: We are committed to building all 41 little league and soccer fields as originally promised. Now that master planning and design has started on Hockinson and Fairgrounds community parks, we have determined that building some of the sports fields at these parks will be far more expensive than originally anticipated because of the extensive wetland areas in both parks and the steep slopes at Fairgrounds..

As a result, we are reviewing the sports field plan and are looking at potentially relocating some of the fields to different park or school locations within the associated little league and soccer club boundaries in order to keep the program within budget. We remain committed to ensuring the success of the little leagues and soccer clubs involved in the parks district by providing the fields they need. More information about any changes to the sports field plans will be provided to our stakeholders and partners as soon as the details are finalized.

Q: Why didn't you realize this sooner?

A: The planning, design, permitting and construction cost estimates prepared in 2004 were an early feasibility analysis before any detailed project scopes were available. We intended to update the budget once the program was underway to re-assess costs, review revenue projections, and see how community input influenced the planned improvements.

When the first group of parks district projects started construction in 2006, we saw that final design costs and actual construction bids were higher than what we estimated in 2004. In addition, more complete site information about some of our larger community park projects gave us a more complete picture of the real-world design and construction challenges ahead of us. As planned, we immediately began a thorough re-examination of the program. This process is now underway. We plan to complete our analysis of anticipated program costs and revenue options in mid-August.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation and Clark County Public Works will present the final analysis, including ideas about how to save money and raise additional revenue to the full Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission on August 18, 2006. We will then present it to the Board of Clark County Commissioners for review and guidance at a work session on August 29, 2006. We will update the public regularly as things progress.

Q: What is the park development process?

A: All park development projects go through three major phases of work: 1) Master Planning; 2) Design and Permitting; and 3) Construction:

Master Planning: A master plan is an artistic rendition of how the park might look once all phases have been constructed. It is not a construction blueprint. What is actually built during the first phase of construction depends entirely on the amount of funding available. Public outreach plays a very important role in developing a master plan, and multiple public meetings are held. All projects are planned and designed based on specific development standards. These standards were created based on county-wide public input and were approved by the Board of Clark County Commissioners and the Vancouver City Council.

Design and Permitting: All park development projects are treated the same as any other kind of residential or commercial development. Depending on the project, various types of local, state and/or federal permits must be obtained before construction can begin. The project manager applies for these permits at the same time they are developing the required technical design drawings and construction documents for the project. These design and construction documents are used to help interested contractors submit bids for the construction contract, and help guide all construction work.

Construction: All park development project contracts are advertised for bids from interested private contractors, and are awarded to the lowest responsive bidder. Clark County oversees the construction contract after it's awarded and inspects all work, and construction is completed according to Clark County code.

Q: How are these projects paid for?

A: Park property acquisition and development costs are paid for with Park Impact Fees, the Real Estate Excise Tax, grants and donations. Park maintenance costs are paid for by the Greater Clark Parks District.

Park Impact Fees: These fees are collected whenever a new residential development is constructed. Clark County first established these fees for purchasing new park property in 1991, and then to pay for park development in 1996. Park Impact Fees are collected and spent within 10 specific Park Improvement Districts located within the city of Vancouver and the unincorporated urban area of Clark County. The fees collected in a particular district are also spent within that same district. Some of these districts cross city/county lines. The state requires that all Park Impact Fees be spent within six years, or be refunded to developers. These fees have not been updated since 2003 to account for inflation and other cost increases, and are no longer adequate to cover today's park development funding needs.

The Real Estate Excise Tax: This tax was first established in by the city of Vancouver and Clark County in 1996. The tax was re-established and updated in 2002. Both were created with support from the Home Builders Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Association of Realtors. These taxes are collected whenever a home is sold in Clark County.

Revenue from 1996 Real Estate Excise Tax was divided between parks and transportation. Revenue from the current Real Estate Excise Tax is divided between parks and community development. The portion going to parks is spent on designing and constructing new urban and regional parks, and on improving existing parks. Taxes are collected and spent within three geographic areas: the city of Vancouver, the unincorporated urban area of Clark County ([link to map PDF](#)), and rural Clark County. Tax revenue collected within the city of Vancouver can only be spent within the city. Revenue collected in the unincorporated and rural areas of Clark County can only be spent outside Vancouver.

Grants & Donations

Since 1997, the department has received over \$8 million in grants and donations for park development and improvement projects. Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation regularly applies for various grants to help supplement its budget. City and county neighborhood associations and citizens can help fund park development or improvement projects by applying for local grants, providing private donations, or conducting fundraising efforts. The Parks Foundation can assist individuals and groups with setting up tax-exempt accounts to accept donations and grant money.

Greater Clark Parks District

Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation cannot construct a new park development project without first securing long-term maintenance funding. This revenue pays for maintenance activities such as mowing, weed and brush control, irrigation, trash removal, and repairing equipment and facilities within the park. Park Impact Fees, Real Estate Excises Taxes and grants can pay for purchasing property and developing

new parks, but not for maintenance. For a long time, lack of revenue for maintenance of new parks limited much needed development of new parks in the unincorporated urban area of the county for many years.

This situation changed in February 2005, when voters in the unincorporated urban area of Clark County created the Greater Clark Parks District. The parks, trails and ball fields included in the parks district program could not be developed without this source of funding.

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